

**IN THE SPECIFICATION.**

On page 4, please replace paragraph 2 with the following:

A<sup>1</sup> Such binding assays preferably are designed to specifically detect one or more analyte molecules under investigation.

On page 5, please replace paragraph 3 with the following:

A<sup>2</sup> Many assay set-ups are known from the art wherein at least one analyte specific component is coupled or linked to a hapten or a hapten-like molecule, e.g. biotinylated or digoxigenylated antibodies, etc. In a more generic manner the term haptenylated analyte specific component is used to indicate that a hapten or a hapten-like molecule is covalently linked to an analyte specific component.

On page 6, please replace paragraphs 3 and 4 with the following:

AB Preferred derivatives and preferred analogues comprise the binding domain of the hapten or hapten-like molecule but may be modified as desired at those parts of the molecule not involved into the binding to the respective and appropriate analogue binding partner. Appropriate derivatives can be easily identified by their ability to improve an immunoassay as described in the present invention. Where biotin is used as the hapten-like molecule, preferred analogues of biotin are biocytin and biotin-methyl ester, the most preferred analogue of biotin is biocytin. It is preferred to use an analogue of a hapten or of a hapten-like molecule in a method according to the present invention.

The free hapten or free hapten-like molecule may be added as a separate component to the reaction mixture or may be present in one of the reagent combinations used to carry out the assay. It is preferred to carry out the assay in such ways that free hapten or free hapten-like molecule is added to or present in

the reaction mixture before the haptenylated analyte specific component is present and the incubation step is performed. At least one incubation step therefore is characterized by the simultaneous presence of a haptenylated analyte specific component, a binding partner for the hapten or hapten-like molecule comprised therein, and the free hapten or hapten-like molecule. Incubation steps usually last from a few minutes up to a few hours.

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On page 9, please replace paragraph 5 with the following:

As discussed above, skilled artisans based on the state of the art knowledge and procedures may, without requiring their own inventive efforts or undue burden, set up a binding assay employing a hapten or hapten-like binding pair. The following discussion is meant to further illustrate the invention but not to limit it to specific examples given

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On page 10, please replace paragraph 5 with the following:

The final concentration of free hapten or hapten-like molecule will vary very much depending on the kind of binding assay used. Especially the concentration in relation to the haptenylated compound as used in the assay has to be determined carefully. Amounts or concentrations of free hapten or hapten-like molecule are preferred which lead to assay improvements in term of sensitivity and/or precision. In the case of homogeneous assays wherein the haptenylated compound is used at a concentration of about 0.6 – 285 nM it is preferred to use 20 – 210 nM of free biotin in reagent R1 and a streptavidin load of 280 – 420 nM on the surface of the latex microparticles in reagent R2.

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On page 20, please insert the following before claim 1:

What is claimed is: